

Fall 1978

The Carroll Quarterly, Fall 1978

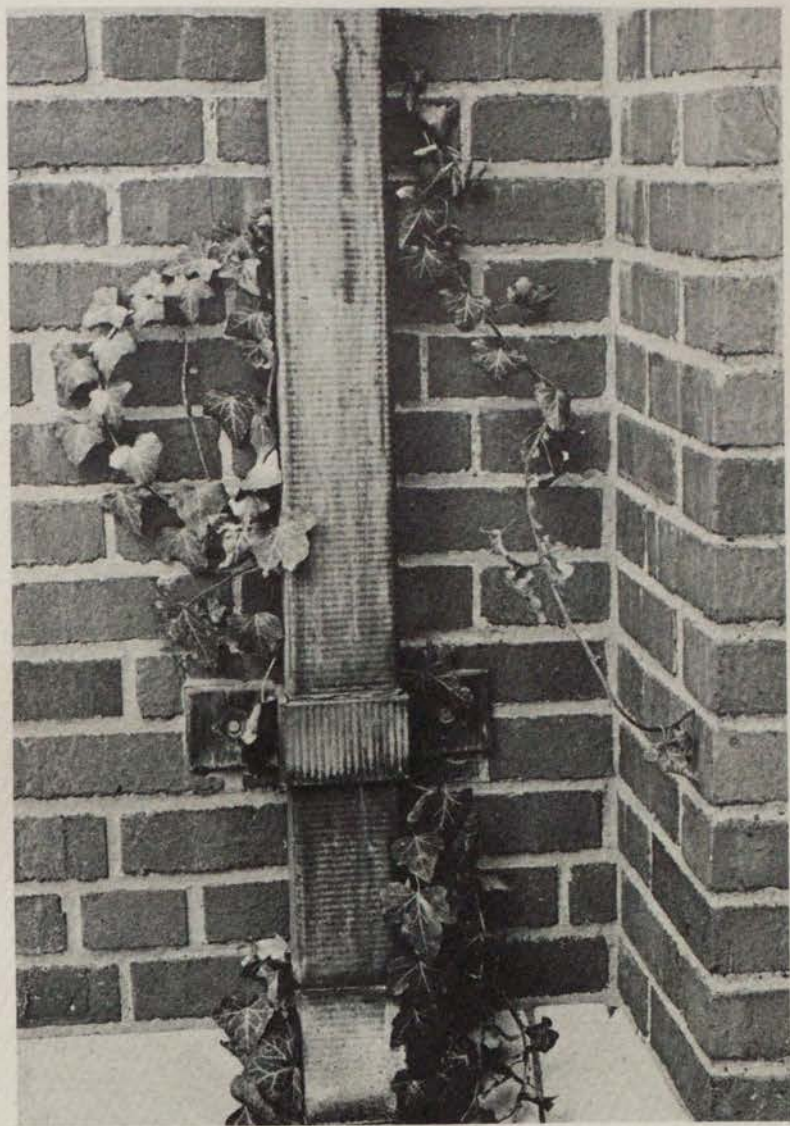
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carroll quarterly

fall 1978

FALLING

The ice of wind
hits sharply our being one morning
and we sway and swing precariously on edge.

The yellow tingles our fingers and fades
as it runs the rivers of our veins,
drying, sapping, leaving
drippings of reds, splotches of browns,
leathery wrinkles of dying hide.

Partially paralyzed we remember
our wrinkled, wet skin
emerging in chaotic motion and
splashes of surging pain;
a symphony of raindrops on our glittering bodies
dancing in daylight crowds and
drifting in nighttime darkness.

But now it is quiet, brittle, brown,
and so quickly a gush of wind...

THE CARROLL QUARTERLY

FALL 1978

The *Carroll Quarterly* is a literary magazine produced by an undergraduate staff, and written by the students, alumni and friends of John Carroll University. Manuscripts should be sent to the English Department.

contents...

cover

John Taormina

Falling

Laurie Ewert

POETRY and PROSE

Out of Stone	
Chris Johnston.....	5
Familiar Waters	
Wende Whitcraft.....	6
Hunting Clothes	
John Obrecht.....	7
O Caro Maestro	
James Magner, Jr.....	9
Nocturne	
Sheila Haney.....	10
Grandmother	
P.J. Bruening.....	11
Home	
Christopher Yeager.....	13
The Fall	
Thomas Carr.....	21
Whimsy	
R. Porritt.....	23
VII	
P.J. Bruening.....	24
The Rockies	
Al Kumpf.....	26
Tantara	
Chris Johnston.....	27
Cambium	
R. Porritt.....	29
Silent Night	
Vince Casaregola.....	30

ART and PHOTOGRAPHY

Anne Crowley.....	4
George Kosicki.....	8
George Kosicki.....	12
R. Porritt.....	22
Anne Crowley.....	25
Greg Hunt.....	28
Greg Hunt.....	31



Anne Crowley

OUT OF STONE

Of Connemara, August 2, 1978

Out of the colorless darkness of night, just at morning dim,
Rises a row of trees, motionless, to stare at the dawning
day
And the pulsing waters over which scavenger birds skim;
Cool, the morning wet lingers quietly in the tall-stacked
hay.

Lakes, like silver chips embedded in the long, green hollows,
Share the early mist with weathered roofs of thatch.
Swift gusts of wind jump over fallen boulders and follow
Each other through the high grass and flowers strong from
the gentle rain they catch.

Stoney homes stand solid; grown from pieces which the earth
let
For endless connecting fences and crooked boundaries of rock,
Piled with the strength of the faithful, mortared only by
sweat,
Steep on the mountainsides or winding cautiously over slopes;
silent guards of brooding bloodstock.

Down to the horizon, the clouds hang, veiling lofty peaks
from sight,
Forests and vales remain damp with their floors of ancient
peat,
Never to become diamonds, but precious as fuel for light,
And gleaming in the hearth when the air is hoared by
wintry sleet.

Warm fires and fragrant kitchens make friendly the dwellings
dank,
Surrounded by crystal waters that from high mountains bled;
Down quickly over falls, they carry a murmured greeting from
distant banks
As they scuffle past walls and quiet ruins whispering from
the dead.

Here, paths were trampled by those marching shielded and
armed;
Here, land was once turned in vain by those who pointlessly
starved;
Fields felt through struggling hands that ever ploughed and
farmed.
Now seen all by the wanderer, wondering what lies before
him, and by whom it had been carved.

Chris Johnston

FAMILIAR WATERS

Summer lightning without rain
Fireflies on our big front porch
Hide and seek in Gran's hydrangea bush
Midwestern gossip over twilit lemonade
Remain.

Unaltered like the land that grew them
Soil for tendrils from my last charade
To search out when it thunders
Or the night is late in coming
And I see a ribbon in the window
From Aunt Arlene's red hair.

There,
The swimming holes of once ago
Ripple, swell and overflow
Like some alluvial pond
Providing me
With moist familiar waters
To quench my thirst
And cry my wounds away.

Wende Whitcraft

THE HUNTING CLOTHES

At dawn, I'd crouch outside the kennel,
Beside the slovenly pitched pile of gear:
The hunting clothes, bearing snatches of fennel,
Thistle and bean-vine, glimmering in the greased mirror
Of blue-metal gun barrels. "And will he,"
I'd wonder again, "take me to the fields this year?"
The gun recoil would tug my shoulder; I'd taste the chile
And steaming black coffee my brothers had known
For several seasons: windblown
Feasts in the cuts of Indian Summer run-off,
Or upon the strewings which had felt the scythe-shear,
but missed the loft.

But I was still too young to follow the hunt,
Father would say, pulling on the canvas
And flannel, the November lineaments of oiled leather.
For I reminded him of the beagle runt,
Who bucked and lurched at the tether,
But adrift in the field would have a tryst,
Not with a rabbit, but rather the curl
Of a backwash stream, or the path of a squirrel.

So I'd be waiting in the drizzle on the porch,
Or beside the kennel with the wane of St. Martin's sun
Serving the returning hunters as a pale torch,
When they brought home the wild and harsh harvest of autumn.

John Obrecht



George Kosicki

O CARO MAESTRO

(In Memory of Aldo Moro
and for his wife and children)

I am ignorant
of Via Trionfale, Tre Ochette
--light that inhabited gardens
and children cradled
in the calyx of your soul
amid turmoil of chambers,
contests of cabinet
and the constant binding of Italian wounds
with delicate fingers.

I am ignorant
of Bari and Maglie
and hands held out again
in the country of the poor
--Christ
of the vineyards
of the South
--his face still imploring
from Taranto and Brindisi.

I am ignorant
of the last isolate hour
upon that terminal beach
and the sky, the suffocate envelope
of all dreams
--her arms again, the garden again
and the children
--the silence of the chalice
held in morning
in radiance
of more than eyes or hands.
I am ignorant
of that despair beyond despair
--the ironic culmination of life
into Life.

I can only do this
in the futile love
I bear you.

Oh that love might bear us all,
even bodies of closed trunks,
beyond Torrita Tiberina,
to gardens, arms and children
(O Caro Maestro!)
of their ultimate afternoons.

James Magner, Jr.

NOCTURNE

Father coughs in his bed
waking again
before the dawn;
reading in the dim,
he hopes for heavy lids.

Mother curls alongside
lulled by the sounds of their
years under covers
and his early exits;
cold sheets left
an arm's reach away
do not disturb the rest in my father's house,

for cacophony comforts,
anaesthetizes all
but me, awake, alert
to the coming silence
(not the call of stranded lungs).

Soon the blanket will be
spread by the silence,
a meddlesome old nanny
whose steps crescendo
with each tick, each hack:
I lie and pray
she stays away.

Sheila Haney

GRANDMOTHER

A satin sculpted cradle of a maiden's dreams
Is the hand-fashioned artifact of your gentler season,
Proud offering to a humbled legacy.

How easily you give this reality
Of sun washed mountain fields
And a lady-in-waiting --

Are we for you the keeping
Of promises that beckoned
Across dark water?

For you give us your artistry:
Fine bones, fine linen,
Fruits of seeds
Sown, sacrificial love.

P.J. Bruening



George Kosicki

HOME

by
Christopher Veager

"Thanks a million," Ed said to the driver, descending from the cab. "Catch you coming south, maybe." The driver smiled and waved, clenching his cigar, and the truck, emitting an oily geyser of exhaust, ground through the cross-roads. The day was sultry; the fumes hung in the air awhile as if debating which direction to take. Ed stood on the gravelly shoulder smelling the tar, his shirt collar damp against his neck. The cab had been hotter than a foundry, and after a ride of one hundred miles even the present mugginess seemed cool. The heat had, however, diverted his mind from his stomach --the heat and the corned beef sandwich that the driver had shared with him. He had eaten nothing else since yesterday evening. His pack was empty, his wallet nearly so, and two days of traveling still lay ahead. He had practiced starving for the trip, but it had been done in a spirit of bravado; consequently, he had failed to allow for the increase in appetite that traveling inevitably brings.

Lugging his pack --by now a mere canvas bundle-- Ed approached a sign pockmarked by B-B shot which jutted from a sheaf of tall grass. When he was sure of what he had seen, he let out a long wheezing laugh, staggering as if clubbed behind the knees. Heat and hunger had conspired to make the town of BULLHEAD an especially droll destiny. Pawing the sweat from his face, he glanced around: in all four directions was smoldering asphalt, bounded by zig-zag rail fences and rocky meadows, and in the distance, smoky banks of trees. A few yellow jackets moved in the tight circles over a rotting log. Ed smiled sardonically. "Nothing like variety," he muttered. Sighing, he slipped an arm through a shoulder strap and, fixing his eye on an elm that reminded him of a giant soda, turned his steps toward town.

On the way he passed a sign whose flaking red lettering apprised him of the L&L Hotel --Meals Served. His spirits brightened; goaded by anticipation and an unfortunate

encounter with a dead skunk, he soon arrived in a community which, owing to temperament or the present heat, or both, possessed the sluggishness of its finny namesake. A few people moved about as if submerged; here and there an older person rocked on a porch or sat in the shade of a doorway. No children were in sight. Ed felt vaguely disturbed, and attributed his uneasiness to the lack of small voices and faces. He was accustomed to the shrieks and staccato cries of four younger brothers and sisters; hearing no such commotion, he felt himself swallowed by an eerie timelessness.

The sensation was real, but by no means confined to an absense of children. Rather, it was part of the larger void experienced by suburbanites upon contact with the smaller north-woods towns that seem dropped among the wilderness like meteorites -- towns which might be said to hold more secrets than surprises. Bullhead boasted the usual non-symmetrical aggregate of boxy structures: a pillbox gas station with a moosehead; a bait shop that sold minnows at the price of steak; a grocery store specializing in canned everything; a bar with a buzzing beer sign; a church to placate the god of fire and snow; a post office for the venturesome. And at the far end, like a block of salt, stood a white frame hotel which looked as if it wished to leave. A railroad bisected the town, serving the purpose of a red light by the unspeakable rise it made in the road. Scattered around the area were an assortment of wood and stone dwellings overhung with spruce and maples. It was a place of absolutes where none seemed to matter.

Ed angled across the street toward the hotel, tar ripping at his sneakers. Passing the bar with its rumbling air conditioner, he heard a long ping, like a flagpole being struck, followed by a chorus of youthful exultation. Behind the post office, which bordered the railroad on one side and the hotel on the other, a group of boys was playing baseball. Through the wire screening of the backstop Ed could see a youngster tearing hell-for-leather around the bases. Touching third, he barreled for home as the throw came from the outfield. Ed paused to watch the play. Catcher, runner, and ball met simultaneously in a veritable scirocco of dust. Immediately a cry of "Out!" rose from the players in the field, while the opposition, who draped themselves over the backstop like human flies, came to life with shouts and motionings of "Safe!" The combatants at home plate were particularly vehement in their opinions, stamping and waving their arms in the manner of evangelicals. Ed smiled. "Safe," he thought, for no particular reason other than he was pleased to see someone closer to his age, and he felt like being positive. He walked on, sensing by the position of the sun that he would be early for dinner. Very well, he would eat the leftovers from lunch, or even breakfast; taste was of no concern. He would eat the moosehead on the gas station if necessary.

An old man wearing a Cincinnati Reds cap and warm-up jacket sat on the hotel porch, his puckered lips moving up and down. He sat with his back to Ed, and when the latter was nearly abreast, nonchalantly shot a brown rope of saliva streetward. He evidently was practiced, for not a drop touched either railing or sidewalk. Ed was not impressed and going up the steps gave him a long look. The old man seemed startled at the sight of the boy. Ed concluded that he must be deaf. Scraping off cinders on the sill, he swung the pack from his shoulder and went inside.

The plank floor, strewn with wicker mats, creaked like an oak in the breeze. Seeing no one about, Ed entered a large room on the right containing tables draped withingham cloths. The walls were papered with tableaux of hunters standing amid log cabins and strung deer; between each of several vertical windows, squat-globed lamps with rose shades alternated with prints of game fish and birds. Above the kitchen door hung the obligatory trophy: a mammoth northern pike with quarter-size moons along its flank and gills flared like a seashell. Ed moved to a table at the rear of the room next to a window. Dumping his pack on a chair, he pulled a map from one of its pockets and sat down. Hitherto he had used the map in the same spirit in which he had planned his rationing, which explained why he was eating dinner in Bullhead. He located the town, much to his surprise, and determined to head back to the junction and try for a ride with another semi. There was a sawmill fifty miles north and plenty of trucks would be headed that way. Near the mill was a small state park which, according to the key on the map, had primitive camping facilities and therefore no charge. The park bordered a lake, and he smiled as he thought of the cool water on his face the next morning.

Ed pocketed the map and looked out the window. Owing to the space between the hotel and post office, he had a box seat view of the game. His head swam and a moment passed before he realized the youngsters were playing hardball. The point was emphasized when a batter sent a screaming foul ball toward the hotel and it exploded off the facing of the second floor and fell to earth with a thud. The third baseman, glancing around furtively for frowning adults, grabbed the ball and whipped it back to the pitcher. Ed himself looked around to see if the crash had awakened any activity in the hotel, specifically in the kitchen. His eyes were met by a pair of rodent orbs that gleamed at him around a swinging door like oily ball bearings. The woman was approaching fifty, with stiff dark hair that stood out from the crown of her head like a hedgehog's. Her front teeth hung on her lower lip, giving her a voracious appearance. How long she had been staring at him Ed could not tell. For a moment the two held each other silently, Ed's mouth glued from thirst and astonishment, the woman regarding him as if he were the meal. Finally she said crisply,

"You're way too early for dinner. Dinner ain't served till 5:30." Ed took a deep breath, letting it out slowly between his teeth. Thoughts of beer and pretzels flashed insipidly through his mind. The woman repeated her message with practiced finality: "Dinner ain't served for another hour." Ed swallowed. "I don't have a watch," he said, "however..." He plucked the frayed billfold from a back pocket and flipped it onto the table. The woman looked at the wallet, at Ed, at his pack, and at the billfold again. Ed leaned forward and, with a significant look, partially withdrew a five dollar bill from its creases. The woman's eyes softened. "I can get you some cold meat and potatoes from lunch and some ice tea," she said. Ed raised his hands as if surrendering. "Fine, fine," he said. "I'm much obliged." With a sigh of relief he tucked the wallet in his pocket. The woman disappeared inside the kitchen, the door wagging behind her.

Ed settled back in his chair and lazily watched the game. The intensity of the youngsters, the way the infielders pounded their gloves and the hitter menacingly pumped his aluminum club, amused him. It seemed contrary to the natural order of such a day as this, when fish would be lying in the shade of a weedbed and animals resting in their lairs. The batter lifted a long fly; Ed smiled: that was better. The careless arc of the ball as it ascended and hung in the humid air, then fell Daedelian into the glove of an outfielder, carried with it the suspension of the day and a certain contentment.

After a time he rose, peeling from the seat, shoved the chair containing his pack closer to the table, and went to find the washroom. Across the hall was a smoking room with brass studded leather chairs and wooden tables littered with wrinkled outdoors magazines. In a corner stood a door overhung with a white-tailed buck's head. The nose had moldered considerably, adding convenient emphasis. Ed turned the glass knob and went inside. The water reeked of iron; he splashed his face repeatedly, savoring the metallic scent.

Returning to his table he found the old man seated in the remaining chair. The baseball cap was pushed back on his head, revealing a freckled temple; a wire dangled from each ear down inside a shirt pocket. To Ed's relief his cheek was empty. He sat with his hands clasped, head cocked and gazing out the window as if eyeing another man's wife. When Ed approached he smiled sheepishly.

"H'lo," he said, in a voice which struck Ed as gentle for a tobacco chewer.

"Hi," responded Ed, sitting down.

The old man looked at his hands. "I...nearly

nailed you outside. That wasn't intentional."

"Of course not."

The old man laughed a little. "I don't wear these things when I sit on the porch. People detour around me out there 'cause they know I like to think, so I don't worry about hitting anyone. I think better when I'm quiet." He looked out the window. "It's a habit from my youth. My folks were poor." He paused. "No one likes to think anymore." Ed nodded, more in weariness than assent. The old man brightened. "You've had that feeling too, huh? Maybe I'm not so crazy after all," he said, looking around at the kitchen. Ed rubbed his stomach, which growled like an elephant seal. "Where you headed?" asked the old man.

"For the present, Barretts Lake Park."

"Figuring to wet a line there?"

"No," said Ed. "I don't own a rod or a reel. There aren't many lakes in southern Illinois."

The old man gave a half smile. Glancing over his shoulder, he leaned forward, the batteries in his pocket squeaking. "See that pike over there?" he asked clandestinely. "I caught it."

"That right?" said Ed, noting the other's slight physique.

"Yep, in Copper Lake, not three miles from here. I have to sneak away when I want to do a little fishing alone --family thinks I can't hear a storm coming-- ha! As if I didn't have ears. Anyway, it was mid-July, and the rest of them were using bait, like they've been doing since the cradle, but the fish were down deep, and I had this old Pikie minnow-- that's a lure --kicking around in my tackle box, so I--"

Just then the rodent-faced woman emerged from the kitchen carrying Ed's order on a tray. Approaching the table, she scowled at the old man. Ed heard no more of the fish story; he could have wept at the sight of the tall mahogany-colored glass cloudy with condensation and the oval plate of roast beef ringed with small potatoes. He had to restrain himself from jumping up and grabbing the tray. The woman put a handful of plated silverware on the table. "Now Granpa, none of your stories," she said sharply. He waved disgustedly. "Ahh, stories! That's all they ever say to me. No one likes to think anymore." He folded his arms and stared out the window.

The woman laid the check, face up, next to Ed's plate.

"I'll be in the kitchen when you're ready to leave," she said. Ed nodded, his mouth already full. She turned to go. Immediately a crash resounded above the dining room windows. The woman whirled about and strode to one where she stood, tray on hip, glowering at the boy retrieving the ball. With her crown of bristly hair, she resembled a Trojan watching Agamemnon's approach. "Those boys have been told not to play hardball," she said as the youngster ran back to the diamond. "The post office put up a sign forbiddin' it, they got so sick of them balls bouncin' off the roof. Now someone's gone and stol'n it."

"Takes more than a sign to break a boy's spirit," the old man interjected. "Any case, if it's gone, what good's complaining?"

The woman's head snapped around and the tray dropped to her side. "I'd have expected better sense from you, Granpa," she said in a measured voice. Glancing at the ball game, she retired to the kitchen, the door swinging wide behind her.

The old man shook his head. "Bah, women," he snorted, puckering the tablecloth with his fingers. "What do they know about matters of the soul? Always talking doom, but never seeing the lightning in the thundercloud. Where is there light without darkness?" This made sense to Ed, who was thinking better now. He bit into a piece of roast beef, letting the juices run around his mouth, and sipped his iced tea as the other continued.

"If a boy has spirit, let him go; he'll touch home eventually. Don't you agree?" Ed nodded. The old man smoothed his bald head, refitted his cap. "All that fuss over a little hardball. That's how baseball should be played. One of these kids might make it to the big leagues one day."

"To the Cardinals," volunteered Ed.

"Or the Red Sox," returned the old man. He paused. "Do you like baseball?"

"Yeah, I'm a National League fan," slurped Ed.

"I like the American League, especially Boston. I like to see home runs go over that big, er, Green Monster wall at Fenway." He noticed Ed was studying his cap. Chuckling, he said, "Selection is limited here; even in Basswood you can often find only Twins caps. I figured that another team with 'red' in its name would serve just as well. Besides, they hit home runs, too"

Ed sliced a potato. "People say the Red Sox rely on the long ball too much, instead of stealing bases or

playing hit-and-run, so when their power's shut off, they're lost."

The old man looked thoughtful. "That may be true," he said, "but when I see a ball fly out of the park, I feel as if I'm soaring with it. I feel as if...well, as if I'm home, though I'm nowhere in particular. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I do," replied Ed, feeling a twitch of recognition.

"I have a little T.V. in my room, and catch Boston games on the networks. When Rice or Lynn hits one out, I jump up and dance around, really whoop it up. The family tells guests I'm looney, I tell them I'm part Indian." They both laughed. "Folks forget I had ability when I was young."

"You played 'ball?" asked Ed.

"Yep, in the outfield. I loved it. Wasn't much good at hitting, but that didn't matter, 'cause I could outrun a fox; since we never had enough kids for a full team, I played the outfield all by myself. I could run forever out there. It gave me a wide open feeling I've rarely had since." He fiddled with a battery. "I should like to have played baseball for a living. It would have been nice, running in the outfield all day. But I didn't have much time away from the house for games; then there was the hearing problem."

Ed swiveled his fork as if trying to drill a hole in his plate. "A deaf guy named Hoy played for the Giants a long time ago," he said. "He stole over five hundred bases: the manager would spell S-T-E-A-L in sign language..." The old man was not listening. For a time he stared at the table as if fathoming something, then he spoke. "My grandson played the outfield, too. He hated chains of any sort -- liked to feel the wind on his face, got dizzy when things became complicated...many times I'd laugh at him, knowing he'd make my mistakes, and feel strangely blessed." He looked up. "You see that fence over by the railroad?" He pointed with his thumb. "They put that up afterward. Lee ran after a fly ball one day, ran and ran, up onto the gravel, fell, and hit his head on the track." He smoothed the spidery hair on his hand. "He never woke up."

The words fell on Ed like stone. His appetite vanished; his flesh seemed to ossify, leaving him inert as the stuffed pike, helpless to do more than listen.

"His funeral meant nothing," continued the old man. "Naturally, the whole town was there, but no one knew what was home to the boy." He paused, looking past Ed. "Except

me. And I made sure he had it."

Ed stared at him. The old man's eyes were blank and a strange whistling emanated from his mouth. He seemed momentarily to have lost contact with the earth. Ed felt like a diver coming up for air; instinctively, he glanced at the game still in progress; then he saw it, rising out of the dust, heading toward him with deceptive speed, uncoiling madly through the air. "Watch it!" he cried, throwing up his arm and ducking at the last instant.

The ball missed him by half a foot, blowing out a portion of the window and bounding underneath a chair, where it ricocheted like a pinball. Glass splashed over table and floor; the old man, awakened by the shout, almost fell off his chair averting his head. When the shock had passed, Ed saw that the game had dispersed; no boys were in sight.

Capless and pale, the old man peered at him across the table as one emerging from a foxhole. Before he could speak, however, Ed sprang up, ripped the wallet from his pocket and flung it on the table. "Buy yourself a quid," he said, grabbing his pack, and ran for the doorway, knocking numerous chairs awry. The woman appeared just as he was exiting. "What was that -- hey, wait!" she yelled, starting after him. "It's all right," the old man said. "He's paid."

In five minutes Ed was back at the intersection. The driver of the first truck going north, struck by his frantic gesticulating, gave him a ride. "Where you headed?" he asked as they roared away.

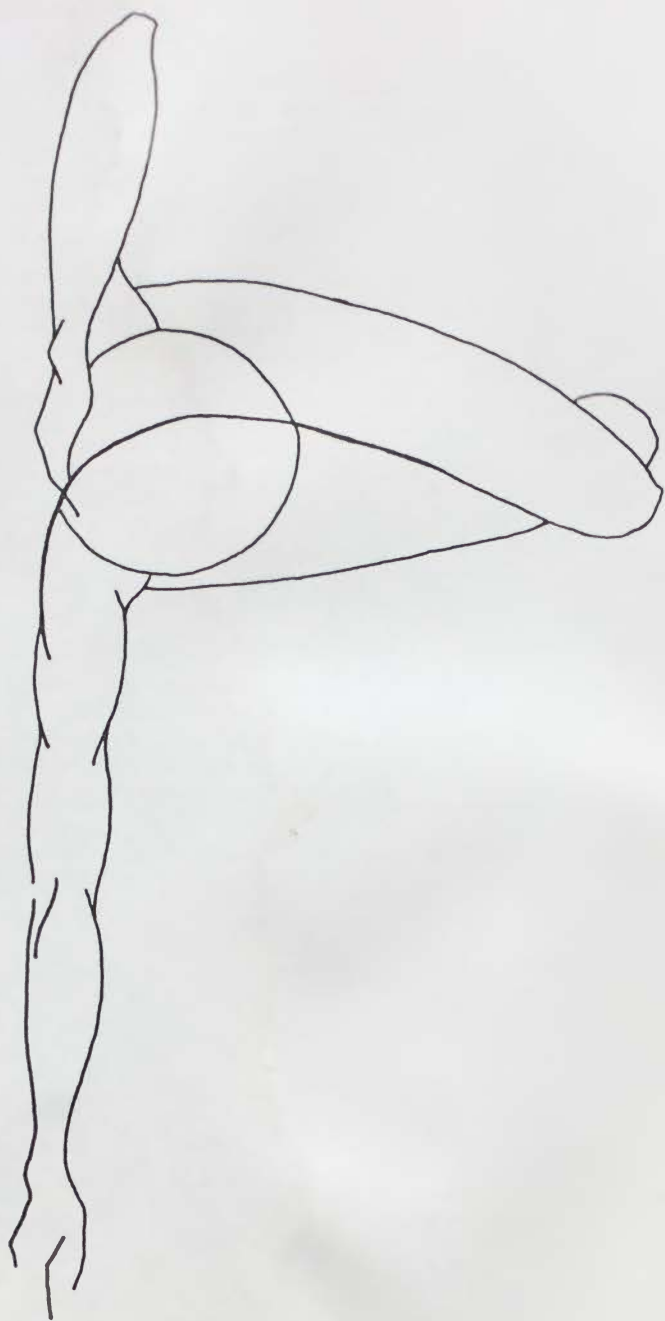
"Anywhere but home," Ed replied, looking straight ahead.

The driver glanced in his mirrors and smiled. He was a storyteller by nature.

THE FALL

Aging year,
vested in vanity,
flirts with a complacent mankind.
Manifold make-ups
fill her weathered cheeks
with the brightness
of a springing youth.
An essence of romanticism
fills the air
from a choir of sweet sounds,
luring mankind
to the circe's call.
Mankind,
blind to her superficiality,
falls into this coquette's trap,
only to find himself
left out in the
cold.

Thomas Carr



18088117
10/1978

WHIMSY

There are those who believe that the correct good
Is the balanced and so power adding machines to
Tap away time to motivate men who are ranked by
Memory locked combinations and dictate letters of
Worthlessstress to secure yet more who verify all
With cornered initials to define denomination as
The numerical value on negotiable.

And they are backed by women
Who go cautiously for different
As they would feel for a knife
They had left at dishpan bottom.
So it is with they who lend
And they who hang the clothes.

But I, I would rather lead
The hockless elephant
Down to the tickling bay
And souse the drouth cracked brown
Until it plied to softened gray.

R. Porritt

VII

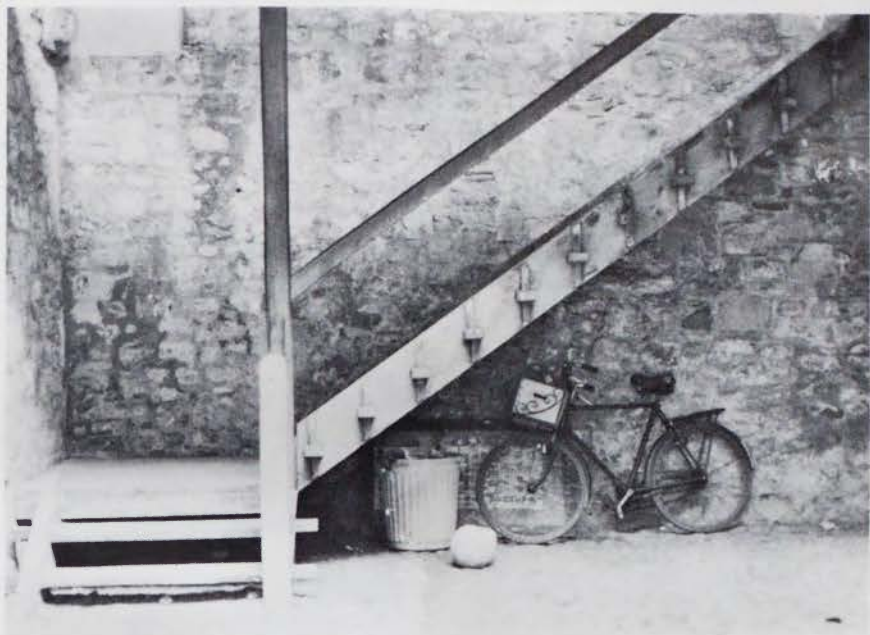
"The flawed moon acts on the truth, and makes an autumn
of tentative silences."

Denise Levertov

"Everything That Acts Is Actual"

When lives have long since
Spun their weaves separate
You will whisper back
And stir a wondering
In the nagging potential
Of a nocturnal kick.
Called again to waking
And away from the stranger beside me
To ease demands of
Progeny, ambivalent
I question past divergent paths
In the night-illuminated distance
(This cold pane poor veiling
for your absence)
And wide searching silence
Chiseled silver in dark.

P.J. Bruening



Anne Crowley

THE ROCKIES

From wheeling prairies
Carpeting his westward spirit,
The pilgrim pioneer awes at
Sinais misted in distant clouds;
Knowing boding Jehovah to loom in those peaks,
He builds his tabernacle in the foothills' womb.

Now in urban shards
The modern soul sealed in cement crypt,
Children of the asphalt questing
Pathways of Pacific-borne sun--
Spirit's desert sands parched for form of God--
In hallowed air behold crescentic shapes
Hymning to the mounted, soaring orb
Polyphony of earth and sky,
Remove sandals, tread the mystic presence
Of a majesty cities whispered to be dead.

O Rockies, in this world without an axis,
In the mindless spinning of this mesmeric top
Infatuating boys who think the earth their toy,
Rape, rudely pillage motherland,
Whose seed weeding in womb bereft
Stillbear towers against dusking desert spans,
Soul pursuing partner to a dance
You rightly orient to the gracing sky;
Its wild conflagration for the unseen God
You fix upon pinnacles of your flaming crests.

Al Kumpf

TANTARA

Silly old man.
Seems like he's always twelve bars away.
New revolving doors revolving his
Countless palm prints on their glass
Match knuckles hardened from pounding on speak-easy wood.
Known by most when he comes around;
Signs on for a few nights here and there
With crusty-suited managers to pump and release tarnished valves
For an all-table audience. Yeah, been windin' that
Piece since he could. Inbetween,
Doesn't mind counting bloodshot cracks in the mirrors
Of the usual closet dressing rooms;
Gives him a chance to practice the French inhale and
Decipher a smoky interior between shows, until
They tell him he's got what they like to hear and
Does more magic with a measure than Valdesse the Marvo
With his spears, then give him hands shaking that
Soon disappear. Backstage exits don't disturb his career,
Just saunters out with breezy steps and claims a new
Curb. Doesn't like to be tied anyway;
Only the road traps his feet.
City life, city work,
Green is the color he's never known, then
Up the street, comin' at him, man, the brightest grill
He's ever seen. Out steps a star, high heels, a
Sequined-frill; yeah, he knew her once when she
Used to tell jokes with her body in Vaudeville.
He remembers, "It's with you I always want to stay,"
She told him, through supple lips that kiss and then stray.
So he knew it was time for him and his dance team,
Wink and Smile, to look for a new corner.
Alone under electric sun until the moon falls and the day
Draws a crowd, then he peels himself into a basement bed
Would do that Transylvania cat up proud.
Hot sidewalks soften the soles, and
Well-softened shoes have solid tracks in their past,
But sometimes stop when the kids spy the
Cleverly designed chips and cracks on his case.
When they ask him, "Hey, what's that you're eatin', mister?"
He bellows,
"Just ice, just ice!"
When they laugh, "Hey, what's that growin' under your feet?"
"Just ice,"
He smiles,
"Just ice."

Chris Johnston



Greg Hunt

CAMBIUM

I would ride swish to the divide
Where pasture grass wedded with wood;
There is much the forest floor quiets.

 In part I understood
Your affinity to trees-- the slanting to seed
Yet another deciduous shiver.
Trees are a study in tremulous effect.

 And at the split time
They learn tawny heads to climb
Up through the graduated levels
Of pseudo-roofs that leak

 With extended reins.
Consciousness is a film thin layer
Adhering inner to outer.
There is much the forest floor quiets.

Brother, if we could step through the trunk
Of that property line elm,
We would pass through a crack in the sky.
But there is to be another way:
You sibling twig grown silent,
Go stand with your bride.

R. Porritt

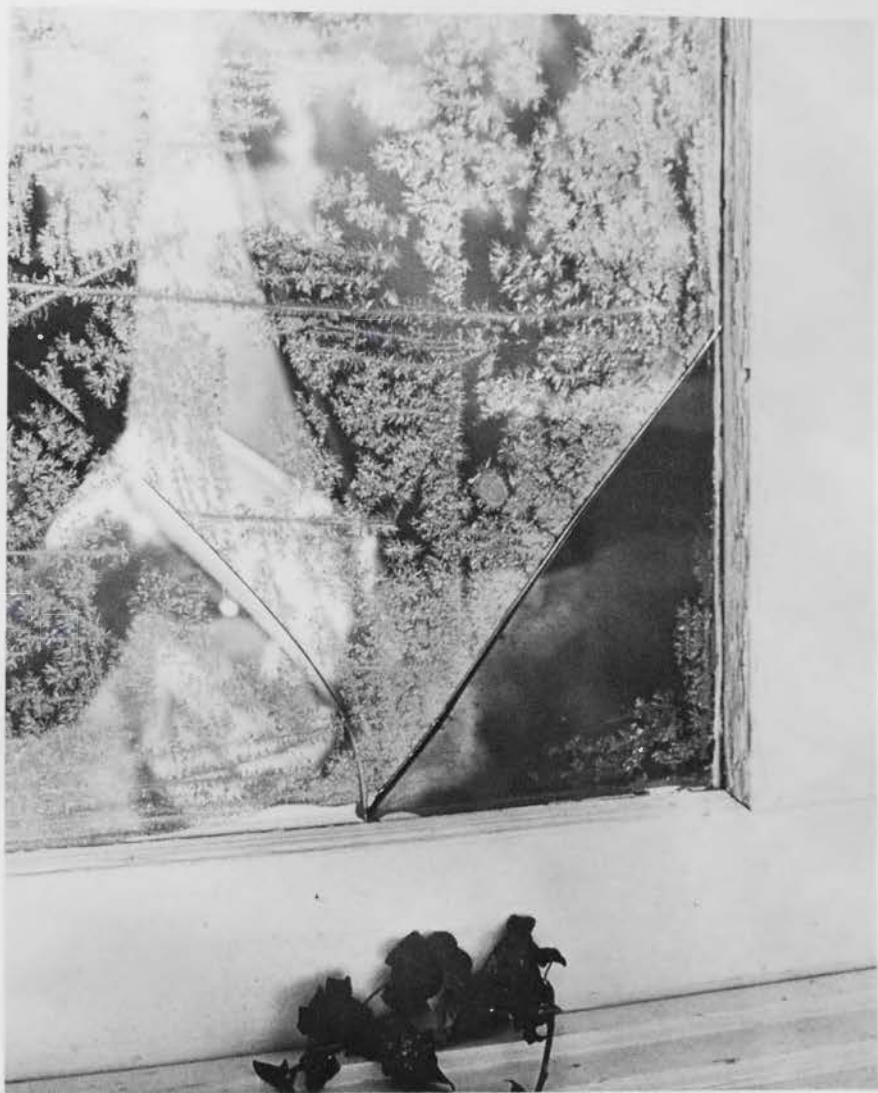
SILENT NIGHT

It's nearly Christmas,
but the year breaks down,
and cold creeps in through the rusted edge;
family alliances begin to crumble
like ancient empires, their founders dead;
while underneath the first light snow
lies the bony rubble of
buildings built a century ago;
now only contractor and wrecking crew,
insensate to their subtle task,
make straight the way for what is new.

Yet, there remains some memory
of a spirit I sensed as a child,
when I'd withdraw from family gatherings
to the darkened silence of an empty room
and watch the lights from other homes
reflected in the night-blue window glass;
I'd stare till some well-meaning friend
or relative would seek me out
to lead me to the lighted world.

Somewhere in those forgotten silences,
alcoves of space and time,
there was a momentary truce between
the armies of the sense and mind,
and all the varied voices of our lives
choired themselves to sing of blessed silence
which rose above us on the darkness,
just beyond our reach.

Vince Casaregola



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